

## A STUDY ON MOTIVATING STUDENTS TO WRITE WITH AN ONLINE PEER-ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of using online peer-assessment system to increase college students' English writing motivation. The students' cooperative learning ability, critical thinking ability and their attitudes toward English writing would be measured by using the group work questionnaire and self-evaluation questionnaire. The subjects of this study were 30 non-English major college students in an English writing classroom in central Taiwan. The students were divided into 6 groups and each group was assigned with a writing mechanic unit to present. Right after each group gave its presentation, the other groups had to grade the performance online in class. The results were summarized as follows:

- While working as a team, students generated good ideas and solved questions by discussing with each other.
- According to the group work questionnaire, students had positive feedback on sharing ideas, encouraging each other, and learning something meaningful.
- Students' self-evaluation survey showed that their English writing motivation had been increased after carrying out the online peer-assessment and working with the other classmates.

Finally, some suggestions and limitations of the study were introduced.

**KEYWORDS:** Peer-Assessment, English Writing Motivation, Cooperative Learning

### INTRODUCTION

The trend in the language classroom has been changed recently, that is, the teacher-centered classroom has gradually become a student-centered environment [1]. Nowadays, the students are more encouraged to be responsible for themselves and explore learning on their own [2][3]. Moreover, the assessment methods have been changed from paper-pencil test to multiple-assessments, such as portfolio or reports [4]. During the teaching and learning process, the assessment plays a critical role because it can not only provide feedback to students' learning, but teachers can also adjust their teaching methods based on the assessment results [4].

During the studying period, students have interactions with their peers for most of the time; therefore, it would be helpful if teachers could use cooperative learning to increase learning outcomes in the classroom [5]. Through the group work, students are able to learn, discuss, cooperate, and supervise each other [5]. Meanwhile, if the teacher can apply online peer-assessment to the learning environment, students' spirit of active participation and learning motivation can also

be inspired [6]. In the end, peer-assessment is hoped to enhance students' learning performances and social skills.

This study used the online peer-assessment system and questionnaires to investigate if students' cooperative learning ability, critical thinking ability and their attitude toward English writing are improved. Thus, the research questions are as follows:

- Can students work as a team and reach a consensus?
- How do students feel to work with the classmates rather than finish the assigned work alone?
- Are students' attitudes toward English writing motivated?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Peer-Assessment

Peer-assessment refers to the students with similar backgrounds or ages can judge each other's performances or in-class work in certain tasks [3][7]. In the classroom, it is difficult for the teacher to take care of each student; hence, the peers become very important. The teacher can use peer coaching method to promote students' learning and cooperative learning skills [8]. The whole evaluation process can inspire students' critical thinking ability and self-reflective ability [9]. Moreover, the students can receive different feedbacks and grades from the teacher and their classmates. Thus, students can obtain learning motivation from their peers as well. Most important of all, peer-assessment provides students the opportunity to criticize and to be criticized because they can grade each other's work [9][10].

However, there are also some limitations of peer-assessment. First, it might cause students' anxiety [11]. Also, some students tend to give high scores to every group in order to reach the harmony in class [12]. As a result, students may not receive real or useful suggestions to modify their presentations.

In short, peer-assessment provides a learning framework among students. This can also promote learning outcomes and inspire their interests, which can be considered as another type of cooperative learning [13][14].

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Participants

The participants in this study were 30 non-English major students who enrolled in an English writing class in a private university in central Taiwan. The students were divided into 6 groups randomly by the teacher. All of the 6 groups were required to present the assigned writing mechanics in class.

### Instruments

First, the teacher chose 6 writing mechanics as group presentation topics, and they are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: English Writing Mechanics**

Writing Mechanics	Group
S-V agreement	1
Fragments	2
Run-ons	3
Pronoun types	4
Adjectives & adverbs	5
Misplaced Modifiers	6

Then the 5-point group work questionnaire and self-evaluation questionnaire (5=strongly agree, 4=agree,

3=neutral, 2=disagree, 1=strongly disagree) were used to measure students' cooperative ability and English writing motivation, respectively (please see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2).

## Procedure

First of all, the assigned topics in Table 1 were explained, and the students were informed that when they needed to present the writing mechanics in class. Next, the students signed up for the online peer-assessment system (ZUVIO). Each student had his/her own account, and the teacher divided them into 6 groups (see Figure 1).

The screenshot shows a user interface for a peer-assessment system. At the top, there is a question in Chinese: "同儕互評：How was the presentation? After the presentation, do you understand S-V agreement?" Below the question are several navigation icons: a checkmark for '重新投票' (Revote), arrows for '前往上題' (Previous Question) and '前往下題' (Next Question), a document icon for '匯出結果' (Export Results), and a magnifying glass for '檢視題目' (View Item). There is also a red button labeled '不滿意' (Dissatisfied). Below these are two small icons: a person with a red 'X' and a person with a green checkmark, followed by the text '導師姓名' (Supervisor Name) and '分數錄影' (Score Recording). The main area displays a table titled '編號' (ID) with six rows, each containing a group name, average score, rank, total score, and search/more/refresh buttons. The data is as follows:

編號	姓名	平均	排名	已評/全評	更多	重設
1	第1組	3.76	1	5/65		
2	第2組	0	2	0/66		
3	第3組	0	2	0/64		
4	第4組	0	2	0/64		
5	第5組	0	2	0/67		
6	第6組	0	2	0/65		

Figure 1: Group List

Moreover, the teacher designed 5 peer-assessment questions for groups to grade each other's performances, and the questions are presented in Figure 2. During each week's group presentation, the other 5 groups used the tablet computers provided by the teacher to do the online peer-assessment (see Figure 3), and the rating scale is from 5 to 0 (Excellent to poor). The online peer-assessment grading interface is shown in Figure 4.

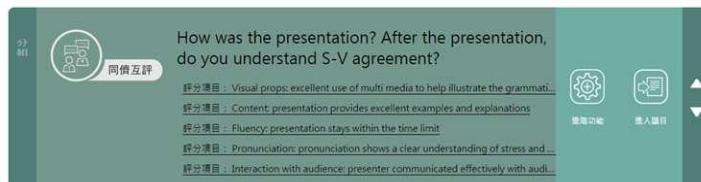


Figure 2: Online Peer-Assessment Questions



Figure 3: In-Class Online Peer-Assessment



**Figure 4: Online Peer-Assessment Interface**

For the group that gave presentation in class, the students in the group need to fill out both the group work questionnaire and self-evaluation questionnaire (please see Appendix 1& Appendix 2). Finally, the teacher would collect the questionnaires right after the presentation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 2 and Table 3 present the mean scores of the questionnaires. In Table 2, item 5 scored the highest which reflects students' positive feedback on working with others and peer-assessment. Among the five items, item 1 scored the lowest. It might because the students are non-English majors and they don't have any background information of writing mechanics. The students may perform better if the teacher explain or teach the writing mechanics at the beginning of the English writing course.

**Table 2: Results of Group Work Questionnaire (N=30)**

Item	Mean (N=30)	SD
The group understands the assigned work.	4.24	0.79
The team shared ideas.	4.33	0.74
The team respects each other's ideas.	4.61	0.56
The team was motivated to do their best.	4.58	0.56
The team learned something meaningful during the preparation process.	4.79	0.42

In Table 3, the highest mean was item 1 which showed students' participation in the group work, followed by item 4, which presented students' active attitudes toward English writing. Among the five items, students scored item 5 the lowest ( $M=4.27$ ). This may suggest that students seldom have the chance to grade each other, and they don't know how to do it. Therefore, the teacher should design clear rating scale and encourage students to learn from their peer's feedback.

**Table 3: Results of Self-Evaluation Questionnaire (N=30)**

Item	Mean (N=30)	SD
I helped the team to finish the task.	4.76	0.44
I shared ideas, materials, or opinions with the team.	4.61	0.50
I joined the group discussion because I knew my peers were evaluating me.	4.55	0.56
After the task, I'd like to write in English more.	4.70	0.47
I think grade others is not difficult.	4.27	0.72

In this study, the peer-assessment process let students grade each other and the teacher can compare his grades with the students. Also, the results of questionnaires illustrated the progress of students' writing motivation, interests toward writing and their critical thinking ability.

## CONCLUSIONS

Originally, the study was designed to create an interactive, student-centered classroom which released students' English writing pressure. The results of the questionnaires and peer-assessment grades all proved that the study motivated students to write in English. First, the students could work as a team and respect each other's ideas. Then they helped each other and learned something meaningful during the process of preparing the presentation. Also, they paid attention to each group's presentation because they had to do the online peer-assessment right after the presentation. Finally, they are willing to write in English after the task.

The limitations of the study were the numbers of participants were so small, and it could be more valid if there is a writing mechanic test at the end of the semester to check students' understanding quantitatively. In the future, if the groups can design 2 or 3 questions and post them online before class, the other students can do the quizzes in advance to check students' understanding of the writing mechanics. Therefore, the students might just report the weakest part of the writing mechanics. By doing this, the students can save their presentation time and create the flipped classroom [15].

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

**Table 4: Group Work Questionnaire**

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The group understands the assigned work.					
The team shared ideas.					
The team respects each other's ideas.					
The team was motivated to do their best.					
The team learned something meaningful during the preparation process.					

### Appendix 2

**Table 5: Self-Evaluation Questionnaire**

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I helped the team to finish the task.					
I shared ideas, materials, or opinions with the team.					
I joined the group discussion because I knew my peers were evaluating me.					
After the task, I'd like to write in English more.					
I think grade others is not difficult.					